

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
744 P Street, Sacramento, California 95814



June 3, 1981

ALL-COUNTY LETTER NO. 81-56

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS  
ALL COUNTY WELFARE STAFF DEVELOPMENT OFFICERS  
ALL COUNTY PROBATION DIRECTORS  
ALL COUNTY PROBATION STAFF DEVELOPMENT OFFICERS  
ALL PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ADOPTION AGENCY  
DIRECTORS AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT OFFICERS  
ALL REGIONAL CENTERS' DIRECTORS  
ALL REGIONAL CENTERS' STAFF DEVELOPMENT OFFICERS  
ALL COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH DIRECTORS

SUBJECT: FOSTER CARE INFORMATION SYSTEM

The State Department of Social Services (DSS) is now developing a Foster Care Information System (FCIS). This letter will present general information about the FCIS and an introduction to its purpose, scope, design, funding and implementation timelines. More detailed information and instructions for participation by local agencies will be presented in subsequent all county letters.

Purpose:

Implementation of the FCIS will bring California into compliance with statutory requirements. Chapter 1229 of the California Statutes of 1980 (formerly AB 3070) mandates county welfare and probation departments to report foster care case information to DSS in order to complete an inventory of all children in foster care and to establish an ongoing foster care information system. The federal Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (PL 96-272) also requires states to conduct a one-time inventory and to establish a permanent, statewide foster care information system in order to qualify for federal funds.

The case-specific information collected and maintained through the FCIS will enable DSS to better evaluate and direct policy regarding the foster care program. Existing sources of foster care case data are inadequate.

Similarly, the FCIS will enhance county welfare departments' management information and reporting systems. By producing tickler reports of necessary case actions due for completion and by tracking service case goals and target dates for goal achievement, the FCIS will help improve individual case management. By providing aggregate data, the system will assist county welfare departments in evaluating and directing internal program policies.

Finally, the FCIS will also establish a comprehensive foster child tracking system. It will provide DSS the ability to immediately, geographically locate each foster child in the state. In response to state legislative concerns about "losing children in the system", the FCIS will further provide the capacity to track each child's movement through foster care and to produce a profile of the child's progress over time toward achieving the permanency planning goals set for him or her. In so doing the system will identify the occurrence and extent of "foster care drift" and will offer a base from which state and local agencies can jointly develop remedies.

#### Scope:

The FCIS will collect and maintain case specific data on all children in California who receive foster care services and/or payments. This will entail both an initial data gathering activity at the local level to establish an inventory or data base, and the regular updating of that data base to reflect case changes, case closures, and new case openings.

Foster children funded by AFDC-FC will be included in the FCIS population regardless of supervising agency. When cases are supervised by agencies other than county welfare departments (such as county probation departments, regional centers, mental health departments, and private adoption agencies), county welfare departments will be responsible for, and assume that all necessary data is collected and submitted to DSS. Similarly, county welfare departments will need to coordinate internally to ensure that services and payments data is reported fully.

The population to be included in the information system is as follows:

- A. Children in out-of-home placement receiving federal/state financial assistance, administered through the county welfare department (i.e., AFDC-FC).
- B. Children in out-of-home placement who receive services from a county welfare department but no federal or state foster care payments (i.e., AFDC-FC).

Child Protective Services cases where the child is temporarily placed in emergency shelter care will not be included in the FCIS population at this time. However, federal requirements may necessitate their inclusion at a later date.

### Project Design and Funding:

The FCIS will utilize an electronic data processing system centralized at the state level. Initial data will be collected by the county welfare departments, batched and mailed to a centralized key data entry point for input into a state computer system. Update data regarding case changes, closures, and new case openings will be similarly collected, batched, and mailed. Turnaround documents will be generated by the computer and mailed to county welfare departments to verify the contents of the computer case file and to request correction of errors in submitted data.

Access to information contained in the system will be available to county welfare departments through periodic computer-generated reports and by special mail or phone requests. The Department of Social Services will have immediate on-line access to information contained on the computer file.

Funds will be allocated to reimburse county welfare departments for initial data collection only. Costs incurred by county welfare departments in the initial data gathering activity will be identified as separate line items on the quarterly administrative claim. Time study instructions for social service and income maintenance staff, as well as specific claiming instructions, will be submitted under separate cover. Costs related to updating information on the data base will be subject to existing county allocations, as the maintenance of an ongoing foster care information system constitutes resumption of a former data gathering activity.

### Timelines:

The inventory of children in foster care will be completed and an on-going management information system established by January 1, 1982. To meet this date, local agencies will be requested to collect and submit the necessary data during the period from August 1981 through December 1981. In order to minimize the workload impact, initial data will be collected at the time of case opening, case closing or normal six month reassessment. To assure that all cases are included, cases which are opened or reassessed in July 1981 will be held aside and the data collected whenever convenient during August and September. This initial case reporting constitutes the inventory and establishes the FCIS data base. After data on a particular case is reported, changes to that case will also be reported. This immediate update process establishes the on-going management information system.


In anticipation of federal requirements, DSS advised county welfare departments by All County Letter No. 81-7, dated January 30, 1981, to maintain a listing of cases closed since January 1, 1981. Counties will be requested to submit to DSS this list of case names and identifying numbers sometime during the initial data collection period. No other information will be required on cases closed prior to August, 1981.

To facilitate the data reporting process, DSS will conduct regional training workshops in June and July, 1981, for administrators and staff development officers from county welfare, probation, and mental health departments, adoption agencies, and regional centers. Detailed information regarding these workshops is being sent under separate all county letter.

In summary, the Foster Care Information System under development by the Department of Social Services is aimed at improving California's system of foster care services and payments to children. It will comply with state and federal statutory mandates and will provide county welfare departments and DSS with much needed case management and program management tools.

Both the scope of the FCIS and time frames for its implementation require close coordination among and active participation of multiple state and local agencies. Throughout the system design and development process, DSS has been working with County Welfare Directors Association representatives in order to ensure county welfare department input. We appreciate the full cooperation of the counties in this critical project. Recognizing the importance of an active state-county partnership, DSS will continue to solicit county input and will provide support throughout FCIS implementation.

Further information will be transmitted in future all county letters. If you have any questions at this time, please contact Beth Hardesty Fife of my staff at (916) 322-6333, or ATSS (8) 492-6333.

  
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Deputy Director

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